



“Are You Dying...To Be Born For Battle?”

First Sunday In Lent

Saturday & Sunday, February 29 & March 1, 2020

The Reverend Elizabeth E. Frey
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Matthew 4:1-11

Alright friends, it's time to hop into a time machine because I want to go back in time to the middle of January. To another time I was standing here. To another time that I was preaching. When I was preaching that weekend in January, we heard from Matthew's Gospel the story of Jesus' baptism, the story in which Jesus is called God's Son, the Beloved. Maybe you remember that was the weekend I talked about the nametag God places on each us, the nametag that reads: “I am a beloved child of God.”

Well, there is a reason I want to go back in time. I want to return to January because of the first line of our story for today: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” This story that we just heard from Matthew 4 continues the story from Matthew 3, Jesus' baptism, that we heard almost two months ago. But we wouldn't know that if we simply followed what the lectionary asks of us, and this fact is important because Jesus' baptism is tied to Jesus' temptation by the devil. These two stories go hand in hand. We need to see them together because this story of temptation makes a lot more sense when we read it in the light of Jesus' baptism.

You see both stories are about Jesus' identity. Both stories are about who Jesus is and who Jesus belongs to. In his baptism, Jesus is faithful to God and he hears God declare him God's Son. And in temptation, the devil tries to turn Jesus from his faithfulness to God **and** by calling him God's Son, the devil calls into question if this name is true. The devil is testing Jesus' identity as God's Son. So, the big question here is whether Jesus will faithfully live into his identity as the Son of God or if he will be less than what God intends – to be the devil's – not God's.

And this is true for us as well. Like Jesus, in our baptisms, we have been claimed by God. We have named by God; we are God's beloved, God's children.

And in our temptation, the devil tries to turn us from our faithfulness to God and tests our identity as God's children. The devil tries to take that nametag off us of us. He wants to see if we will be less than what God intends. So like Jesus, our temptation calls into question our identity as God's children. Will we faithfully live into our identity as children of God?

Because let's be real, let's be honest with ourselves, we don't always live as faithfully as God intends for us to live.

I'll go first...I joke that when the time comes, when I walk up to the pearly gates, the first thing Jesus will say is: "You were such a gossip." And my response will be, "...yeah." I won't be able to deny it. When we gossip, we deny others their identity as God's children. Or when we judge or speak badly about others, we are attempting to take away their beloved identity before God; it is as if we are saying they are not worthy to be loved by God.

Or here's another common way, we turn from God: when we think we can do it all on our own, we turn away from God's faithfulness. When we don't ask for help, we don't trust God's promise to remain faithful always.

Another part of our call as God's children is to pursue justice and peace, to help those in need, to stand up for the oppressed. Remember these are things, we are called to as a part of baptism. Our holy responsibility is: "to proclaim Christ through word and deed, to care for others and the world God made, and to work for justice and peace." When we don't do these things, we fail to live into our identity as God's children.

But friends, in this season of Lent, we have a chance to practice for temptation in the wilderness, for temptation in the real world. In our story for today, Jesus shows us the way; Jesus gives us a road map for this battle against temptation.

As Jesus stood before the devil, he chose to answer with words from God. Jesus lived deeply in the word of God, and we too can live in God's word because when we read our bibles, God gives us faith. God's word nourishes us for the road ahead. God's word shows us how to live like Christ, how to live as God's children, how to live into the Kingdom of God. Again and again, Jesus shows us how to care for others, how to stand with the oppressed and marginalized, how to be peacemakers.

Jesus, in the face of the devil, also chose to live faithfully. Jesus trusted God. Now we all know that this can be hard for us sometimes. There are moments when trusting God can be the hardest thing for us to do. But friends, never forget that even when we aren't faithful to God, God is faithful to us.

When the devil asked Jesus to worship him, Jesus' response was "worship the Lord your God." So friends, come to worship, be a part of this community, get connected because worshipping God, receiving communion, connecting with other brothers and sisters in Christ, gives us strength, gives us courage, gives us the faith for the battle in our everyday lives.

So sure, we are all tempted sometime or another. But we have also been born into God's family. We have been claimed by God. We have been named by God. We are God's beloved children.

And nothing can change that. Nothing the devil tempts us with. Nothing we say or do or try to be can be can separate us from God.

There will be moments in life when we – or something else – tries to take that nametag off. When we are tempted to deny God's claim on us, when we attempt to turn away

from God's faithfulness, when we don't fully live into our identity as God's children, but as I said months ago that nametag is permanent. God's claim on us sticks. In God's eyes, we are for keeps and we are worthy of God's faithfulness.

So, yes, you are born to battle, but God has already won the war on our behalf. Amen.

Copyright © 2020, Elizabeth E. Frey. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org